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ABSTRACT

In preparing urban teachers to become effective classroom communicators, urban speech teachers should involve their students in interpersonal communication within an intergroup context whenever possible. Students must be taught to become sensitive to word choice, aware of the importance of verbal and nonverbal codes, and more empathic. To accomplish this goal, teachers must investigate the feelings and attitudes of people of other groups by learning facts about them via children, parents, and books. They can also get additional communication training through self-analysis and intergroup and interpersonal situations designed to develop empathy. Some approaches which may be used to accomplish this goal are simulation games, communication effectiveness exercises, role playing, and self-disclosure. Guidelines for future urban educators include the following: (1) interracial communication is facilitated when the communicators share a common coding system; (2) meaning communication in transracial contexts requires the proximity of source and receiver; and (3) interpersonal communication with transracial contexts often fails because the sender and the receiver do not share or seek each other's point of view. (SW)

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COMMUNICATION APPROACHES FOR THE INTERGROUP EDUCATOR

by

Kathleen M. Galvin*

leave me alone, i would always shout
i may be Spanish, but i'm proud of it.[1]

--Miriam La Santa,
high school student

Hypocrites

I hate these people who say they care
But when you look at them
You can tell they don't
They fill your mind with fancy hopes
And then they let you down.[2]

--"Monk" Tom Burns,
high school student

"Miss Galvin, if I don't talk to you when I'm in the hall with my friends, it has nothing to do with you. I can't talk to teachers when I'm with them."

--Conversation with
high school student

Education can be a joyful and/or painful self-discovery process for students and teachers, but today many teachers are leaving the profession before experiencing the joy because they are defeated by an inability to communicate with their students. Students are dropping out or tuning out because they aren't being heard or understood.

In this paper, I wish to focus on certain approaches an urban speech department can use as it contributes to the preparation of urban school

teachers. This is a critical issue from a professional and personal point of view. Many urban speech departments serve students preparing to enter teaching careers and many departments have communication courses designed specifically for teachers. As a teacher for the past six years in an intergroup school, that is, one that contains several racial and/or ethnic groups, I have had to learn the hard way what affected the communication and thus the learning in my classes. Some basic assumptions underlying this paper are:

1. Teaching is a communication process.
2. Urban schools are intergroup schools that contain majority and minority teachers and students. In some cases, the teacher will represent one group and the class, another. In other cases, the class will be composed of several identifiable groups.
3. Effective interpersonal communication fosters learning.

It is my position that urban speech departments should involve potential urban teachers in interpersonal communication within an intergroup context to whatever degree possible. Teachers should be prepared to be empathic communicators in interpersonal, intergroup encounters.

Students preparing to teach in any situation need to be aware of the communication process as it applies to a classroom. They should begin to understand themselves as communicators through self-analysis and the feedback of others and should be able to develop communicative strategies to facilitate instruction of their students. This necessitates a theory-lab course applying communication theory to classroom issues.

A student preparing to teach in intergroup situations must have this experience with a focus on the intergroup classroom. She must analyze herself as a communicator, not only to members of her own group, but to members of other groups.

Throughout the speech-communication course, she should be challenged to analyze: 1) her purpose in preparing for urban school-teaching; 2) her feelings about members of other groups; 3) her ability to communicate with members of other groups. Only by a continuous process of self-analysis and discovery will she be able to reach an understanding of how she does communicate to members of other groups and how to modify her behavior if she desires or needs to do so.

The speech-communication class may provide a way of experiencing intergroup, interpersonal communication situations aimed at developing empathy for intergroup situations. If the speech class is an intergroup situation the learning will be enhanced.

In his thesis, "The Role of Empathy in Reducing Intergroup Conflict in an Integrated High School," Michael Cohen discusses traditional methodologies for resolving intergroup tension and improving relations among groups. These include:

1) Contact Theory - which assumes increased contact with members of other groups will enable people to know each other better and therefore improve relationships between groups.
2) Informational Theory - which assumes that planting "right" ideas in the minds of receivers will be followed by "right" behavior.
3) Group Discussion - which assumes a series of intergroup meetings to air differences, let off steam and, perhaps, draw a plan of action will improve intergroup relations.
4) Field Study - which assumes that direct perceptual experiences in another community's life and affairs will improve relations.[3]

Taken as individual approaches, each above methodology has been generally unsatisfactory, but

taken as part of a communication approach designed to increase awareness and empathy, they may make unevenly valuable contributions to improving intergroup communication.

Teachers must be aware of the verbal and nonverbal codes of their students which convey information, attitudes, values and feelings, and must begin to perceive situations from the students' viewpoints. A strong social sensitivity rests upon empathic responses; these are basic to "assuming the role of another" and hence, to social interaction and intergroup empathy. "The sign of the absence of empathy is misunderstanding."[4]

Verbal and Nonverbal Codes

Effective communication exists when the receiver decodes the message exactly as the sender encoded (intended) it. In any situation accurate communication is rare, but in intergroup situations it may be even more difficult to achieve.

As a prospective urban teacher investigates the verbal and nonverbal communication codes, she will be forced to consider the relationship of perception to the accurate transmission of these codes. For her, the importance of shared or common meanings based on common experiences will take on new meaning when applied to an intergroup situation. If we accept the statement that communication is facilitated when the communicators share a common coding system, we can begin to understand the importance of encoding and decoding skills in intergroup classroom learning.

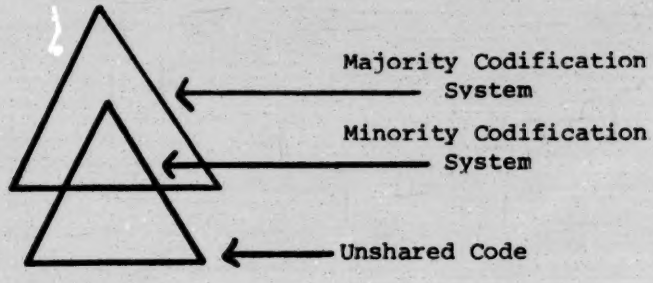
Because the prospective teacher needs to develop skills in dealing with different coding systems she should be exposed to various examples of encoding and decoding situations to aid her in developing skills of understanding and analyzing different codification systems. She needs the ability to handle new codes, not just the information to

deal with a specific code. As she moves from school to school, or situation to situation, she needs the ability to adapt to different codes because the shared codification system improves the chances for achieving understanding and learning in her classroom.

Let us examine the verbal code first. As a receiver, any teacher in an intergroup school must be prepared to decode language which may not have been part of her vocabulary before. One of our student teachers reported, "Until last week I never heard of a 'humbug' and now I know enough to get concerned when I hear there's a humbug down the hall." Words such as "dude, crib, hawk, gig, space, jam" became an active part of her decoding vocabulary in a few weeks. If she taught in another school it is likely that her decoding vocabulary would include different verbal expressions.

Some educators question the teacher's responsibility to learn to decode or receive words of a specific group. There seems to be little substance in their position if they are concerned with communication, or sharing of a code, within a classroom. Students can decode most words within a teacher's verbal code and, I believe, a teacher should be able to decode language used by groups of students in her classes.

In discussing transracial communication, Arthur Smith presents the following model of codification systems:[5]



From this diagram it is obvious that the larger the shared code, the greater the chances for effective communication. A teacher who shares a greater code opens channels of communication providing some students with opportunities to express themselves comfortably in non-threatening situations.

In "Teaching Teachers to Comprehend Nego Nonstandard English," Williams and Rundell conclude:

> Currently, there is speculation that the inner city Black child is separated from the standard-English-speaking-teacher far more by his lack of production capabilities in standard English than by his comprehension capability. Accordingly, teaching the teacher to at least comprehend Nego Nonstandard English may be a most practical and economical way to lessen this linguistic barrier in the classroom.[6]

This does not mean that a teacher must speak in the verbal code of groups in her classroom, but it does mean she participates in the communication process with them using whatever codes are necessary for effective communication. Many intergroup communication situations have been harmed when a teacher affected the verbal code of a class in an attempt to be "in" or "accepted." Charlotte Epstein, an educator concerned with intergroup communication, strongly discourages a parroting of a group's communication. She states:

> No one is suggesting that teachers begin to use obscenities when speaking to poor children. Nor is the image of the middle-class educated adult using the current slang particularly attractive. But there is a big difference between listening carefully to all words to understand meanings and to establish communication, and parroting

> the youngsters' language when one feels neither comfortable nor particularly communicative doing so.[7]

As an encoder of verbal messages, a teacher needs to be sensitive to her receivers. Discussions of certain subjects, such as religion or family, may be handled differently according to the receiving group. Very often teachers are unaware of expressions which may be offensive to members of other groups or they assume the group member will be amused by, or ignore the words. Sensitivity to word choice facilitates classroom communication. Sometimes teachers must be educated to potentially offensive language. In discussing this issue, Epstein suggests:

> We must, of course, learn not to use words or terms which members of other groups find offensive. Many people who maintain that they never employ racial or religious epithets are surprised to learn that words like "boy," when used to describe a minority-group man, and expressions like "I jew him down" imply prejudice, or at least gross insensitivity, to minority-group people. A majority-group person may protest that he "didn't mean anything" by his choice of words, or that "we always use that expression." But such terms originated in stereotypic thinking and discriminatory behavior, and the sensitive person will recognize the hurt and anger they evoke and so eliminate them from his vocabulary.[8]

Thus, potential teachers must become aware of the importance of shared verbal codes for effective classroom communication.

The nonverbal code is critical and often more difficult to explore than the verbal code. For example, Thomas Kochman describes a nonverbal communication breakdown in a classroom:

> In an urban classroom an Anglo teacher is reproaching a Puerto Rican child. Part of his response includes the lowering of his eyes. The teacher moves toward the child, lifts his chin and even more harshly than before, scolds, "You look me in the eye when I'm talking to you!" The child is hurt and bewildered. Rapport between this student and teacher is irreparably damaged.[9]

Kochman explains that the teacher "misread" the Puerto Rican child's lowering of the eyes as minimizing the reproach whereas the child was expressing respect for the teacher's authority, "for in his culture to look an adult in the eyes when being scolded would be a sign of impudence and gross disrespect."[10]

As an encoder of a nonverbal message, a teacher needs to be sensitive to her receivers. Backing away from a student, or immediately changing a tone of voice when approached by a student of another group, communicates much to the student receivers. Discipline issues in many schools center on the unequal treatment of members of different groups, either an ignoring of one's behavior or a more severe punishment of their behavior.

For a teacher to establish strong lines of communication with any students, she has to develop an empathy for their perception of the world. Empathic communication is different among those who share the same cultural patterns and codes, but the task becomes even greater among people who not only operate from different codes and are unaware of how these differences may interfere with effective communication, but are also unaware that

there are even different codes in operation. Thus, a teacher must be aware of the potential differences in codes and the ways to build a bridge of common meanings.

Because each situation may be different, potential teachers may develop certain expectancies from individual examples, but they must learn to investigate another's perception of the world for the purpose of sharing a codification system.

Processes of Investigation

Some of the basic ways of investigation are contained in the following suggestions for the teacher who wishes to learn more about attitudes and feelings of people of other groups.

> First, she needs the facts. They can help her to expand and deepen her awareness of how people think and what they feel about intergroup matters--all people, not just members of her own group. And she must begin to listen to other people. If she is of the majority group, she may listen to Negro commentators and read novels, poems, stories and essays by minority writers--a superb way to listen in a psychologically safe atmosphere. She must listen to the children she teaches, and, as much as possible, to their parents. She must open her mind to listen with recriminations, signs of rejection or devaluation of what she hears. For feelings are facts and no amount of recrimination will change the fact that the feelings she hears expressed exist. She knows that familiarity with people's feelings undergirds any approach to teaching new behavior and attitudes.[11]

A potential teacher may learn a great deal from

the above approach but this may be strengthened by the addition of communication training, including self-analysis as a communicator and studying and experiencing intergroup and interpersonal situations designed to develop empathy.

The speech-communication class may utilize the aforementioned approaches (contact theory, informational theory, group discussion, field study) as part of a theory-laboratory approach to an intergroup classroom. These approaches, coupled with interpersonal theory and exercises, may foster a sharing of information, attitudes, values, and feelings aimed at developing empathy. The theory and exercises would give a prospective teacher present personal growth and a method for improving interpersonal communication in future intergroup situations.

The following are approaches which may be used as part of the speech-communication course.

Simulation Games

Simulation games can provide exciting student interaction and an excellent point of departure for future discussion. Within a safe situation students are given the chance to make decisions from a different perceptual framework and to live with the consequences of those decisions. Cohen defends the use of simulation games in teaching intergroup communication because he believes that "although the superordinate goals are artificial in nature they nevertheless produce real consequences in interpersonal emotional involvement. Simulations may offer a meaningful human relationship between students of different backgrounds and experiences."[12]

Some examples of appropriate packaged simulation games are:

Black and Whites - Psychology Today
Sunshine - Interact Company
Confrontation - B'nai B'rith Anti Defamation League.

Communication Effectiveness Exercises

A class may engage in exercises related to communication accuracy, directed feedback and perception pitfalls. To develop intergroup communication accuracy students may engage in dialogues and role-reversal testing, restatement exercises, word-association tests and the sharing of terminology. (In an interracial communication class at UCLA black students devised a "black lexicon" and white students tested it in the white community.)13

Direct feedback situations allow students to receive feedback from intergroup receivers on their communicative behavior with suggestions for possible modification of the behavior. The modified behavior may be attempted within the safe setting and further feedback may be received. The class may progress through levels of descriptive, interpretative and evaluative feedback.

Perception pitfall exercises may include the use of case studies, art materials and pictures by which to consider traditional stereotypes or the creation of masks. Completion tests and projective techniques may be used to introduce the concept of expectancies within intergroup situations.

Role Playing

Similar to the simulation games, role playing allows a student to work out problems in different ways in safe situations. A student may attempt to alter his own behavior or to put himself in another's place and respond as he thinks the other would respond. Teachers have used role playing successfully in demonstrating discrimination behaviors within the classroom. Epstein justifies this approach to intergroup situations in the following manner:

> Role playing may serve to overcome the initial difficulty of speaking directly to intergroup problems ... As the class tries to understand people's fears of each other, they may develop some ease in discussing the subject and eventually find the courage to admit their own fears. There is no shortcut to, or substitute for, speaking candidly about one's feelings and beliefs, if we are to develop self-insight, understanding and acceptance of ourselves and others.[14]

Self-Disclosure

The sharing of feelings among members of different groups depends on a developed trust level. Students may be encouraged to engage in progressively open self-disclosure throughout the term focused on reactions and feelings in intergroup situations. Psychologist David Johnson defines self-disclosure as "revealing how you are reacting to the present situation and giving any information about the past that is relevant to understanding how you are reacting to the present."[15] Thus, self-disclosure may occur as a regular follow-up to role playing, simulation games or communication effectiveness exercises.

Thus, the student in an intergroup interpersonal communication class is provided with personal insight and a series of approaches for analyzing and improving her communication behavior in future intergroup situations. She should be able to reach a point where she no longer says, "How would I feel in that situation?" but "If I were (Maria, Darrell, Mike...) how would I feel in that situation?"

In discussing transracial communication contexts

Arthur Smith presents the following principles as some of those derived from theory. I believe we can substitute "intergroup" for "interracial" and "transracial" and derive valuable guidelines for a future urban educator.

1. Interracial communication is facilitated when the communicators share a common coding system.
2. Meaningful communication in transracial contexts requires the proximity of source and receiver.
3. Interpersonal communication with transracial contexts often fails because the sender and the receiver do not share nor do they seek each other's point of view.[16]

When a teacher becomes open to the way of life as experienced by her students and when she can place her world in theirs at the risk of changing her own perceptions she opens the door for meaningful communication and learning. We must help our students begin to reach this goal.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Virginia Baron, ed., Here I Am (New York: Bantam Pathfinder edition, 1971), p. 18.

[2]Baron, p. 42.

[3]Michael Cohen, "The Role of Empathy in Reducing Intergroup Conflict Within an Integrated High School" (unpublished M.A. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1971), pp. 11-35.

[4]Cohen, p. 36.

[5]Arthur Smith, "Interpersonal Communication Within Transracial Contexts," in Speech Communication Behavior, ed. by Larry Barker and Robert Kibler (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1971), p. 312.

[6]Frederick Williams and Edward Rundell, "Teaching Teachers to Comprehend Negro Nonstandard English," The Speech Teacher (Sept., 1971), p. 177.

[7]Charlotte Epstein, Intergroup Relations for the Classroom Teacher (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 88.

[8]Epstein, p. 51.

[9]Thomas Kochman, "Cross-Cultural Communication: Contrasting Perspectives conflicting Sensibilities," (Mimeo issued by Department of Linguistics, Northeastern Illinois State College, July, 1970), p. 1

[10]Kochman, p. 6.

[11]Epstein, p. 50.

[12]Cohen, p. 57.

[13]Andrea Rich and Arthur Smith, "An Approach to Teaching Interracial Communication," The Speech Teacher, (March, 1970), p. 145.

[14]Epstein, p. 108.

[15]David Johnson, Reaching Out (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1972), p. 10

[16]Smith, pp. 311-316.

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